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SUBJECT: BRV REACTS TO U.S. MEDIA REPORT OF POSSIBLE USG
DESIGNATION OF VENEZUELA AS STATE SPONSOR OF TERRORISM

REF: CARACAS 000320

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR DANIEL LAWTON
FOR REASON 1.4 (D)

¶1. (SBU) Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (BRV) officials and sympathizers reacted angrily to a March 10 article in the "Miami Herald" that reported on a supposed White House inquiry into whether Venezuela should be listed as a state sponsor of terrorism. At a book signing event that evening, Minister of Communications Andres Izarra referred to the article as evidence that the USG is attempting to "isolate" Venezuela from the international community by placing it on the list. Izarra said the USG's actions were a response to the "defeat" it suffered at the Rio Group Summit in the Dominican Republic, where the diplomatic crisis between Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela was diffused. The Minister added, "Once talk of war in the region was subdued, they (USG) began looking for new ways to attack, topple, and advance their plans to finish off the Bolivarian Revolution." Izarra's comments were widely reported on state-controlled electronic news sources.

¶2. (SBU) The Bolivarian News Agency (ABN) reported on comments made by state-television, VTV, personalities and newly elected members of the PSUV's steering committee Aristobulo Isturiz and Vanessa Davies, on the possible designation. Isturiz said the opposition would likely welcome the designation because "they are willing to do anything to topple President Chavez." The journalist repeatedly accused the USG of attempting to launch a pre-emptive war against Venezuela. In addition, Davies characterized the White House inquiry as another U.S. aggression against Venezuela.

¶3. (U) The March 11 edition of the ardently pro-government daily "Diario Vea" did not mention the "Herald" article or Izarra's comments. There were, however, other inserts and full-page ads that portrayed the events at the Rio Group Summit as a loss for the USG and a win for President Chavez. One ad, for example, shows Chavez and Colombian President Alvaro Uribe shaking hands at the summit. The headline reads "What Makes Latin America Stronger Infuriates the United States. Peace Triumphed at the Rio Group Summit." A separate full page article deemed the summit a success because it "derailed" USG efforts to use Colombia as a base from which to destabilize Venezuela.

¶4. (C) Comment. The BRV clearly intended to exploit Chavez's conciliatory stance at the Rio Group Summit to the fullest extent. The "Herald" article, however, has distracted attention from the story the BRV wants to cover. The purported White House inquiry also comes on the heels of a

string of events - Exxon-Mobil's legal actions against PDVSA, continuing "briefcase-gate" revelations, and the Embassy demarche on the BRV's lack of narcotics cooperation, which, on top of the March 11 Human Rights report release, will be seen as a deliberate USG campaign to discredit the Chavez regime. We expect more severe BRV public reactions in the coming weeks. End Comment.

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